DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 427 CS 211 921

AUTHOR Li, Xiaohong
TITLE "Peking Review's" Coverage of the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake in China.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989). Maps may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discourse Analysis; *Earthquakes; Foreign Countries; *Journalism; Mass Media Role; *Newspapers; *News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS *China; Chinese Communist Party; Media Government Relationship

ABSTRACT

Triggered by inconsistencies and omissions in the reporting of casualty statistics and earthquake magnitude of the 1976 Tangshen (China) earthquake, this paper examines coverage of the natural disaster by "Peking Review," China's only foreign language news weekly. The paper's main section analyzes in detail "Peking Review's" coverage (in five consecutive issues in August and September 1976, as well as in follow-up stories--three before the earthquake's first anniversary and two articles in 1979 and 1986), examining how China handled the earthquake journalistically and practically, and why. The next section discusses the inconsistencies in earthquake magnitude and casualty figures reported in the international press and in the Chinese press, as well as disparities in the figures reported at different times in "Peking Review." The paper takes into account Chinese journalistic practices, the relationship between the press and the Chinese Communist Party, and the impact of politics on journalism in China at that time. Sixty-six endnotes are included, and an appendix contains three maps. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED311427

Peking Review's Coverage of The 1976 Tangshan Earthquake in China

Paper Presented at the Association for Education and Mass Communications (AEJMC) 1989 Convention in Washington, DC

International Communication Division

August 10-13, 1989

Xiaohong Li

School of Telecommunications

Ohio University

Athens OH 45701

CS211921

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Xiaohong Li

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Peking Review*'s Coverage of The 1976 Tangshan Earthquake in China

It was in the early morning of July 28, 1976. I had thought it was a thunderstorm when I woke up. But I realized it was not because we were running out of the house instead of staying in. "Earthquake!" Yes, that is what it was. However, no warning had been given. Was it over, or were there more to come? Where was the epicenter? Were there casualties involved? Nobody knew. Afraid there might be another tremor, we waited outside [it was also raining then], anxious to hear something about the earthquake. But it was not until a few hours later that we got some information from survivors from Tangshan, a city about fifty miles away from where we were. "Tangshan is probably the epicenter!" "The whole city is leveled!"

I was spending my summer vacation at my parents' house in a village north of Tangshan, an industrial city of about one million people in Hopei [Hebei] Province in north China.[See map in Appendix] Luckily, not much damage was done to the village and nobody was killed, although a few people who happened to be in Tangshan at that time were killed.

---

* Peking Review changed its name to Beijing Review in January 1979, along with the phonetic change to the Pinyin system of other names of people and places in China. But Beijing Review will be used where necessary. The changed spelling of other names mentioned in this paper will be given in brackets.

All we heard about the earthquake later on that day was from more survivors from Tangshan, who were coming to the village because that was where their homes were or where they had relatives. In the few days that followed, the village received more quake victims, who came either for shelter or for medical treatment, or both. Most of them were with minor bruises and many were seriously injured.

I visited Tangshan a week after the initial shock on July 28. I had a friend there whom I was not sure was alive or dead. On my way to the city, I could see traffic was very busy, with all kinds of vehicles bringing in emergency aid or transporting quake victims to places outside the epicenter. Among the people fleeing the city, some were barely dressed, most were injured, and many looked dead. Closer to the city I saw a lot of newly formed mounds, clearly they were where the quake victims were buried. Entering the city, I saw more of those burial mounds by the roadside, under the trees, by the destroyed buildings. Hardly any building was left standing. With some difficulty, I finally found the rough location where my friend's family lived. Not a single person I saw was without some injury. I looked around and did not see anyone I knew. On the other side of the rubble I saw some temporary houses, and there I saw all members of the family except my friend. She was killed. She was on her night shift when the earthquake struck. The family was never even able to find her body.

What I experienced and saw after the Tangshan earthquake have continually brought back memories, especially since I began the

present research. I felt obligated to write it down, to let people learn about the disaster from an individual who had been there. After all, this account may not be available anywhere in the press.

Tangshan, an important industrial city with a population of about one million, is the site of the Kailan [Kailuan] coal complex, the third largest of the nation, a 500-year-old pottery, a large thermal generating plant, iron and steel facilities, locomotive building, cement machinery, and many other local enterprises. But the earthquake in 1976 "abruptly destroyed everything."

> At 3:42 in the early morning of July 28, 1976 the century's most destructive earthquake levelled the city of Tangshan within 23 minutes, killing 247,269 people. The quake measured 7.8 on the Richter scale and had a force 400 times that of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima by America during World War II. [1]

This is an excerpt from a feature about Tangshan carried in China Pictorial in its October issue of 1986. The report released casualty statistics of the earthquake and updated what happened to Tangshan ten years after the quake. Beijing Review, on the tenth anniversary of the earthquake, ran a similar but more detailed report on Tangshan. It called it a "killer earthquake" and said "Tangshan was almost totally destroyed."

> Almost a fifth of Tangshan's one million population ... lost their lives.... The survivors ... were stranded in a city where 97 percent of buildings and all the railways, highways, bridges and public utilities had been destroyed.[2]

Both of these accounts given ten years after the earthquake present a picture of what the earthquake may have looked like

then. But readers were not informed of this back in 1976. Casualty statistics were not released until the end of 1979. The magnitude of the quake was mentioned only once in 1976. One case in point is the differences in the magnitude of the earthquake that was reported. Peking Review, on August 9, 1976, reported it as 7.5 without specifying the earthquake scale.[3] Three years later, it was reported as 7.8 on the Richter scale.[4] American news magazines reported it as 8.2.[5] Another example is also number-related. Of the casualty figures the Chinese government officially released in 1979, the number of deaths was 242,000 and the injured 164,000.[6] Yet, outside China, estimates of deaths ranging from 650,000 to 800,000 have been given.[7] Survivors from the stricken area also were aware that the number of deaths reported by the Chinese press was significantly smaller than that of the actual deaths.[8]

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to prove the true magnitude of the earthquake, and the actual casualty statistics, because of the unavailability of access to the official data, this is what triggered the study. What could have possibly accounted for these differences? To address this question, it was essential to find out how the earthquake was covered then. Of particular interest is how the earthquake was reported to the rest of the world. Peking Review was chosen for the study because it is China's only foreign language news weekly.[9] By analyzing Peking Review's coverage of the earthquake, this paper will explain how China handled the earthquake journalistically and practically and why; and what could have accounted for the differences concerning

the magnitude of the quake and the casualty figures. This paper also will look at the journalistic practices, the relationship between the press and the Chinese Communist Party, and the impact of politics on journalism in China at that time.

The Tangshan earthquake occurred in such a unique year in Chinese history that what happened in China then deserves particular mention. It was what was later recognized as the last year of the Cultural Revolution.[10] The year had started with an ominous note: January 8 saw the death of revered Premier Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai]. On April 7, Teng Hsiao-ping [Deng Xiaoping], once rehabilitated, was overthrown again. Marshal Chu Teh [Zhu De], another major Chinese leader, died on July 6. Three weeks later, on July 28, the killer earthquake occurred in Tangshan, which also affected the nearby port city of Tientsin [Tianjin] and the capital, Peking [Beijing]. Then, following hundreds of thousands of deaths in the earthquake, was the death of yet one more person, Mao Tsetung [Mao Zedong], great leader of the Chinese people and Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. After Mao's death, Hua Kuo-feng was appointed the new Party Chairman, and the "gang-of-four" was overthrown.[11]

These events, especially the following changes in the Party and government, prove helpful in understanding Peking Review's coverage of the Tangshan earthquake.

Peking Review carried stories of the Tangshan earthquake in five consecutive issues until the death of Mao in early September 1976. Then coverage of the earthquake gave way to the coverage of Mao's death and the political changes that followed in the Chinese

government. However, three more stories either about, or related to, the earthquake were found in Peking Review until August 1977, and the study included them. This was considered an appropriate stopping place for the study because the next story about the earthquake did not appear until over three years later.[12] By then China had already undergone a lot of changes, including the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States, the beginning of an open-door policy, and China's historic shift of efforts from revolution to modernization. For comparative purposes, the two articles that appeared on December 28, 1979, and on July 28, 1986, also were used in the study.

Peking Review first covered the Tangshan earthquake in its August 9, 1976, issue. It was a combined issue of two weeks and there apparently was a three-day delay of the publication date of that issue.[13] Six pages out of forty-eight, including eight pictures, were devoted to the coverage of the earthquake. "Brave Fight Against Earthquake" was the enlarged, bold-face type general heading that appeared on the cover page, on which the order of importance of the articles to be printed was already established. The coverage began with the Chinese Communist Party's (C.C.P.) message to the stricken areas of Tangshan, Tientsin and Peking. After a 10-column address, the message acknowledged that a "strong earthquake" occurred in Tangshan, on July 28, which also affected Tientsin and Peking, and that the earthquake caused "great losses to people's life and property."[14]

The message continued with cordial sympathy to the people by Mao and the Party and their confidence in the people in rebuilding

their homes through "self-reliance," because the people were "armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, and tempered in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." The Party called on everyone to

> conscientiously study Chairman Mao's important instructions, take class struggle as the key link, deepen the great struggle to criticize Teng Hsiao-ping's counter-revolutionary revisionist line and repulse the Right deviationist attempt at reversing correct verdicts, and unite to fight against the serious natural disaster. **Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and surmount every difficulty to win victory**![15]

Following the Party's message was an editorial by the People's Daily, which told readers that "under the loving care" of Mao and the Party, people in the stricken area "have fought heroically and won great victories."[16] Quotes from Mao were frequently used to encourage and convince the people that they would surely conquer nature. The editorial praised highly Party members, leading cadres, army men, workers, and farmers, who, with their own deeds, "have composed a magnificent song of revolutionary heroism."[17] It also noted that the rest of the country was sharing their concern by sending "large quantities of medicines, food, clothing, building materials and other relief supplies."[18] The editorial ended by urging the people to "resolutely respond to the militant call of Chairman Mao and the Party Central Committee, [and to] conscientiously study Chairman Mao's important instructions." [19]

The third story was about the C.C.P. Central delegation's visit to the stricken area. For the first time a picture was used. It was a medium shot of Premier Hua Kuo-feng meeting the Kailan coal miners. The delegation's visit moved the local people so deeply that they shouted "Long live Chairman Mao!" and "Long

live the Communist Party of China!"[20]

After the Party sent the message of sympathy, the People's Daily editorialized, and the central delegation set foot in the stricken area, there came the news from Tangshan:

> Figures released by the nation's network of seismological observatories specified the magnitude of the principal shock to be 7.5, with the epicentre at 39.4 degrees north latitude and 118.1 degrees east longitude. Damages of varying degrees were reported in the epicentral region.[21]

Seven pictures accompanied the article showing workers studying the party's message and back at work, and various relief measures being taken. Though "damages of varying degrees" were absent from the pictures, they could be implied from what might be called positive reporting:

> People in the afflicted area have been given accommodations and the several thousand medical workers who rushed to the seriously affected places in Tangshan have given first aid to the injured. Railways, highways, water and electricity supplies and telecommunications damaged by the quake are being restored step by step.[22]

The tone of all four articles was identical and exactly the same information could be found from article to article. They all emphasized the leadership of Mao and the Party, the guidance of the revolutionary line, the superiority of China's socialist system, and the valuable experience from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. All four stories ended in a similar note: people in the stricken area were either called upon, or they pledged to "take class struggle as the key link, [to] deepen the great struggle to criticize Teng Hsiao-ping."[23]

In the following issue, published on August 20, 1976, a total

of another six pages was devoted to the earthquake. The "anti-quake and relief work" was found now to be more closely connected with the movement to criticize Teng Hsiao-ping. Another People's Daily editorial began the earthquake report. "Earthquakes serve to temper people's revolutionary will," the editorial began.[24] After a similar account of what had been given in its previous editorial, it reminded people that "in a class society, man's struggle against nature is closely connected with class struggle."[25] Teng Hsiao-ping was singled out for his being "the arch unrepentant capitalist-roader in the Party" and criticized for his philosophy that "whether it is a white cat or a black one, it is a good cat as long as it catches mice."[26] The editorial stressed that "the site of the anti-quake and relief work is also a battlefield for criticizing Teng Hsiao-ping."[27]

The earthquake report carried in the same issue was titled "A Heroic People, a Heroic Army." It reported more "heart-stirring" news from Tangshan. Some 10,000 coal miners returned safely to the ground. The First Party Secretary of Tangshan thought first of the safety of the the city's million inhabitants. More leading cadres, company directors, and model workers took emergency measures and rescued many "class brothers." More good news followed, including the fact that a colliery had quickly restored production. Accompanying the story was a picture of miners rejoicing at turning out their first load of coal after the quake. A railway line that ran through Tangshan also was reopened to traffic. Peking Review continued with more heroic deeds performed by the fine military educated by Chairman Mao. By now Tangshan Power Plant had begun to supply electricity; public buses, banks,

and some shops were back to normal; and twenty-one factories and mines had wholly or partially resumed production.[28]

Also carried in the issue was a commentary titled "A Miracle" by the People's Daily. Congratulating the successful return of the 10,000 coal miners of Kailan and other achievements made in Tangshan, the commentary said that some foreigners' allegation that "Kailan was finished" was "entirely groundless."[29] The commentary boasted that the working class, the people and the army, led by Mao and the Party,

> are able to bring their tremendous enthusiasm for socialism into play, overcome any difficulties and dangers and perform one miracle after another.
>
> They are today making outstanding contributions by taking class struggle as the key link, deepening the criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping, displaying the spirit of self-reliance, grasping revolution and promoting production.[30]

The August 27, 1976 issue published a list of foreign leaders, and a separate, but much longer, list of Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations which had sent cable solicitude over the Tangshan earthquake.[31]

Another article (about three and a half pages) featuring the quake in the same issue was titled "Fearless People." It told of more stories that showed "dauntless heroism in face of the disaster."[32] One was about how a cadre organized an emergency meeting to evacuate the miners trapped in a pit. Another was about a young radio operator, who "always drew strength from Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought whenever he came up against difficulties." "The earth was heaving and the bricks and tiles were flying in all directions." But the radio equipment was still

inside the building. What was he to do?

> At that juncture, he immediately remembered Chairman Mao's teaching which he had committed to memory: "**This army has an indomitable spirit and is determined to vanquish all enemies and never to yield. No matter what the difficulties and hardships, so long as a single man remains, he will fight on.**"[33]

So the young radio operator, at the risk of his life, ran in and saved the radio equipment. "The Train That Withstood the Quake" was the third feature story in the article. The two locomotive drivers of an express train that was approaching Tangshan when the earthquake struck applied the emergency brake and brought the vibrating train to a halt. The Party branch committee of the train "called on the crew to take class struggle as the key link and ensure the safety of everybody aboard and keep the train in working order."[34] The P.L.A. (Chinese People's Liberation Army) sent thirty trucks two days after the incident, and all passengers were evacuated to safe areas.

That Tangshan Iron and Steel Company partially had resumed production made news in the September 3, 1976 issue. The article (about two thirds of a page) said that the first "anti-quake iron will steel" turned out by the company was a "great victory for Chairman Mao's revolutionary line."[35] Also mentioned in the article were other plants or factories that had partially restored production.

On September 1, 1976, a conference was held to laud the representatives of "advanced units and individuals in the anti-quake and relief work" in Tangshan, Tientsin and Peking.[36] Peking Review, in its September 8 issue, noted that the conference was held

> in an excellent situation in which the struggle to criticize Teng Hsiao-ping and repulse the Right deviationist attempt at reversing correct verdicts was developing in depth and great successes had been achieved in the anti-quake and relief work.[37]

The article ran five pages long, including two large pictures (covering one page and a half) showing the conference in session. The article listed important Party and state leaders at the conference, reported the conference proceedings, and quoted at length from "an important speech" by Premier Hua Kuo-feng. Hua's speech was no more than a summary of Peking Review's previous coverage of the earthquake. Chairman Mao's instructions, his revolutionary line, Party guidance, class struggle, and criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping were emphasized throughout Hua's speech. In addition, he also mentioned a recent earthquake in Szechuan Province, to which Mao and the Party also sent a message of sympathy. Great victories there also were won under the provincial Party Committee and with the aid and support of the country and the army. Hua also remarked on China's seismological work. He said it had "kept to the correct orientation and line" and must be raised "to a new level so as to make still greater contributions to the socialist revolution and construction."[38] Peking Review "borrowed" a People's Daily editorial once more in its report:

> Pointing out the fact that there has always been a struggle between the two lines on the question of how to deal with natural disasters, the editorial stressed that only by adhering to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line can disasters be overcome and socialist revolution and construction pushed ahead.
>
> The editorial stressed the need to continue to give full play to the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance and hard struggle and restore and develop in an all-round

> way industrial and agricultural production in the quake-stricken area.[39]

Till now Peking Review had covered the earthquake in five consecutive issues, with the last article lauding the heroic deeds and great successes in the stricken area, and calling on the people to win even greater victories. The coverage might have come to a slow halt by now even if Mao had not died. But Mao did on September 9. He died as if to prove speculation true. Newsweek, in its first coverage of the Tangshan earthquake on August 9, had said:

> The great tremors also could reverberate on a psychic level, since many of China's people still attach great significance to natural omens.... The new quake [the Tangshan earthquake] may be interpreted widely as a sign of even worse trouble to come. Even in the reborn China of Mao Tsetung, a quake as immense as the one in Tangshan has a specific meaning to the superstitious. It foreshadows, they believe, the impending death of an emperor.[40]

After Mao's death, coverage of the earthquake in Peking Review disappeared until its November 26. At this time, Hua Kuo-feng had become the new Party Chairman, and the "gang-of-four" had been overthrown. Peking Review now published an article (about three pages long) on some issues related to the Tangshan earthquake. This time, instead of having the criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping as the focus, repudiation of the "gang-of-four" took place. "The 'Gang of Four' Sabotages Anti-Earthquake and Relief Work" was the title of the article. The "gang-of-four", who had been sitting at the podium as important party and state leaders at the conference of representatives of advanced units and individuals in anti-quake and relief work, now had committed "towering crimes...in plotting to usurp Party and state power and undermining anti-quake and

relief work." The "gang-of-four",

> paying no heed to the the conditions of the afflicted people, not only refused to go to the stricken area but did not bother to listen to briefings on the effects of the quake.... [They] did all they could to put up obstacles and brought unfounded charges against the Party Central Committee, vilifying its grasping its anti-quake and relief work as "not grasping class struggle" and attacking it by saying that "a few people are trying to use anti-quake and relief work to brush aside revolution" and "brush aside the criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping."[41]

The gang also was cited for saying "what [does it] matter if Tangshan is wiped off the map", which "sang exactly the same tune" as imperialists, revisionists and reactionaries who "gleefully alleged that Tangshan had vanished from the earth."[42] Then, Peking Review told of more enterprises in Tangshan that had resumed production. The article concluded that "a vigorous mass movement is now gaining momentum in Tangshan to expose and repudiate the 'gang-of-four' anti-Party clique."[43]

Peking Review brought more good news from Tangshan in its January 21, 1977 issue. It was a brief article (about half a page long) giving more production figures concerning a colliery and a gears plant. The use of familiar political slogans and emphasis on a mass political movement were absent now from the article, although the leadership of Chairman Hua, which used to be Chairman Mao, was still stressed:

> The concern shown by Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua and the Party Central Committee gave them tremendous strength in overcoming the effects of this natural disaster.
>
> Full of confidence, the workers are determined to make still greater achievements in the new year under the leadership of the Party Central committee headed by Chairman Hua.[44]

A year after the earthquake, Peking Review carried another article (about two and a half pages long) about Tangshan, covering the whole prefecture this time, including the counties under its administration. The article began by noting that Tangshan did not disappear from the map as some foreign sources and the "gang-of-four" had said. Peking Review supported the assertion that "750 kilometers of tunnels" in Kailan Coal Mine had been repaired, production in Tangshan Iron and Steel Company had "attained pre-quake level," and the ceramic export quota had been fulfilled. Similar reports were given with examples from county enterprises and commune farms. At the same time the article reminded readers of the great concern shown by Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua, especially the latter, and how he had "mobilized the people to fight the aftereffects of the quake."[45]

It was now exactly a year since the quake had struck Tangshan. Peking Review covered it for five consecutive issues and published three more stories before the first anniversary of the quake. It was natural that Peking Review's coverage of the quake was slowly halting, especially since victories had been won and most production had been resumed.

Before discussing the questions raised in the paper, it is helpful to look at two more articles about Tangshan carried in Peking Review, one on December 28, 1979, and the other on July 28, 1986.

For the first time Beijing Review released casualty statistics concerning the Tangshan earthquake in 1979:

> What has become of Tangshan three and a half years after the strong earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale hit that industrial city on July 28, 1976, which resulted in 242,000 people killed and 164,000 seriously injured?[46]

The article, less than half a page long, addressed the question in terms of housing plans and production figures. This time, political slogans and worship of Party leaders were absent.

On the tenth anniversary of the Tangshan earthquake, Beijing Review published a much longer (eight pages) and more comprehensive article, with a map showing the epicenter of the quake, a picture showing army men rescuing the quake victims buried in the rubble, and several other pictures showing life in Tangshan after the quake. "Tangshan: Reborn From Rubble" was the title, in which there were individual stories about reconstruction of Tangshan, foreign aid, new families that formed after the quake, and the life of the handicapped, the lonely, and the orphaned. The article repeated the casualty figures, and told of the rescue work done immediately after the quake, and city planning for earthquake-resistant structures, all of which "took place with close attention from Party and state leaders, including Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, Deng Xiaoping and Li Xiannian."[47] In one story titled "'If Only the Open Policy had Come Earlier,'" Peking Review said:

> the speed with which Tangshan recovers from the earthquake is astonishing, but under the pride and sense of accomplishment lies the unmistakable awareness that mistakes were made and opportunities lost.... Though many countries had offered outright contributions, the Central government, determined to rebuild the demolished city on its own, turned the offers down flat.[48]

Journalistically, there is no doubt that China gave sufficient

attention to the Tangshan earthquake. Just over a year before the Tangshan earthquake, on February 4, 1975, there had been another strong earthquake in the Yingkou-Haicheng area in Liaoning Province in northeast China. The magnitude of the quake was reported to be 7.3, which also resulted in "varying degrees of damage in the epicentral region."[49] Peking Review published two 1975 articles about the earthquake, one on February 14, about one third of a page long, and the other on March 21, about three pages long. Although the size of both earthquakes was about the same and both caused damages of varying degrees, Peking Review gave a lot more coverage to the Tangshan earthquake. However, one important difference between the two was that the Liaoning earthquake had been predicted and the people had taken precautionary measures. Therefore, coverage of the Liaoning earthquake was mainly propaganda on how China had successfully predicted a major earthquake. With the Tangshan earthquake, it was different. No prediction was made, and there had been no warning. Nor did Peking Review make any mention of earthquake prediction this time. What Peking Review emphasized, instead, was the relief work being done, the "heroic deeds" performed, and the "great victories" in the stricken area. Though Peking Review published no pictures that showed any damage, nor any details of the destruction of Tangshan, the readers inferred material damages and human casualties by the amount of attention given by the government and the press, the kinds of aid that were pouring into the city, the figures about restoration of production, and the re-opening of shops, banks, buslines, and schools.

China did a remarkable job in recruiting aid from the rest of the country, in organizing the local people in the relief work, and in rebuilding a city that was destroyed. It was evident that China did all this by itself and that it turned down foreign offers of aid at that time, although Peking Review never mentioned anything directly related to international aid until ten years after the earthquake when it admitted having made a mistake in declining the foreign offers. Time magazine and U.S. News & World Report, in their first coverage of the Tangshan earthquake in August 1976, reported that the Chinese government rejected emergency aid offered by foreign countries.[50] Why did China not accept it? Answers can only be speculative because China has never officially given any explanation, nor has this question been addressed elsewhere. Based on Peking Review's coverage of the earthquake, one thing was clear: besides an emphasis of politics and class struggle, Peking Review also stressed the importance of reconstruction through self-reliance, which had been the guiding policy in China's socialist construction. Self-reliance, as explained in an article titled "How China Carried Out the Policy of Self-Reliance," means "to rely on the strength and diligent labour of our own people," "to make full use of all available resources in our own country," and "to get the necessary funds for construction through internal accumulation."[51] It was the policy of self-reliance, said the article, that had enabled China to "withstand the pressures of imperialism, old and new colonialism and modern revisionism."[52] In fact, self-reliance was already built into the constitution of the People's Republic

of China.[53] China also had had experience with the Soviet Union, which withdrew its experts working in China and invalidated the contracts and agreements with China when China's economy was facing difficulties because of the three consecutive years (1959-1961) of natural disasters. With regard to international aid,

> life has taught us the lesson that it is important to discern the real nature of foreign aid before accepting it. The foreign "aid" provided by imperialism is nothing but an instrument of aggression. We Chinese people do not want such "aid." We welcome and accept aid given on the basis of proletarian internationalism, aid coming from socialist countries which uphold Marxism-Leninism as well as aid provided by the revolutionary people all over the world.[54]

Given this context, it was logical that China did not accept any foreign aid. After the Tangshan earthquake, China seemed to be only adhering to the policy of self-reliance and possibly still remembering its experience with the Soviet Union. The deaths of two major Chinese leaders, the failing health of Mao at the time, and the political upheavals during the year were probably too much for China to handle at that time. After all, China's open-door policy did not come until 1979, and after ten years of revolution (since 1966), which had been against all forms of revisionism, capitalism and imperialism, China was not ready to welcome support from the rest of the world, especially from non-socialist countries.

While no difference occurred between Chinese and outside sources on the registration of other earthquake scales, there was disparity, as pointed out earlier, on the Tangshan earthquake, not only between Chinese and outside sources, but also within Peking Review's own coverage.[55] However, whether the Tangshan

earthquake was measured 7.5, 7.8 or 8.2 on the Richter scale, and whether the death casualty was 242,000 or between 650,000 to 800,000 is not as important as understanding why China seemed to be consistently playing down the disaster.

One speculation is that if China had reported the actual Richter scale, it would have been very difficult to reject foreign aid and foreigners' coming into the epicenter.[56] The fact that the publication of the first issue covering the earthquake seemed to have been delayed also could probably be interpreted as a reflection of China's indecision on how the earthquake was to be reported. In contrast, the first issue of Peking Review after Mao's death came out four days ahead of the regular publication date.[57] What is implied here was that Mao's failing health was a known fact (not to the ordinary people, though), while the Tangshan earthquake caught China totally unprepared. Thus, Peking Review only mentioned the earthquake scale once as 7.5 in its first article and then never again until 1979. It was obviously trying hard to avoid mentioning the magnitude of the quake. By doing this, and not releasing casualty statistics, China kept foreign sources from knowing the exact information and therefore made them speculate and get information from tourists, visitors, and diplomats who happened to be in China during the earthquake.

The Economist speculated that China played down of the disaster because of its failure to make any prediction of this earthquake in spite of its "much-vaunted" prediction in 1975.[58] Could this have constituted an embarrassment for the Chinese government? What was clear was that Peking Review made no mention at all of any earthquake prediction throughout its coverage of the

Tangshan earthquake. However, Premier Hua Kuo-feng did give a positive assessment of China's seismological work, saying that it "won gratifying successes through assiduous research in earthquake prediction" and have "made several successful forecasts of major earthquakes."[59] Thus, the positive side of China's seismological work was still stressed.

The playing down of the disaster also may be explained in terms of different press concepts. Mass media in China are an integral part of the government. Their functions have long been made clear since the founding of the People's Republic of China: they are mouthpieces of the Party and the government, and they are powerful tools for the Party to guide revolutionary struggles and socialist construction, to publicize Party decisions, and to educate the masses. The press should speak for the Party and the government, and information and opinions should be given in the terminology of the Party's line and policy. China is a socialist country believing in Communism. It is nonetheless a developing country where nation building is emphasized and communications are used to promote national goals. Natural disasters in Communist nations, William Hachten noted, tend not to be reported as "quickly and fully as they are in the West."[60] When discussing characteristics of communications in China and the Soviet Union, Ithiel de Sola Pool noted that you need to "read between the lines" in seeking facts from the available information.[61] But could facts be covered up? China seemed to have tried. Even in 1978, when an American "Earthquake Engineering and Hazards Reduction Delegation" visited China during the months of June and

July, China still did not grant permission to visit Tangshan and be briefed about the reconstruction effort. The Delegation "was given no information about casualties, relief operations, or rebuilding."[62] With today's rapid development of modern communications technology, bad news may get increasingly difficult to cover up. Even China's "top secret" government document concerning Tangshan earthquake apparently got out of the country, as mentioned in a footnote in Earthquake Engineering and Hazards Reduction in China:

> Hong Kong's South China Morning Post in its January 5, 1977 issue stated that a "top secret" Chinese document said that 655,237 persons were killed and another 779,000 were injured. Of the injured, 79,000 were reported seriously hurt. The title of the document was given as "Material (Part II) for the study of the Conference on Resisting Earthquakes and Relieving Disasters Among Third echelon cadres."[63]

Through Peking Review's coverage of the Tangshan earthquake, a lot also was revealed about the journalistic practices in China then. Party leadership and politics were in command of almost everything. Mass political movements, a legacy of the Cultural Revolution, were as important as, if not more than, anything else. Reporting followed a written formula, never failing to use exact phrases such as "armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought," and "tempered in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution."[64] With the downfall of the "gang-of-four", who were assumed to control all mass media, changes were gradually taking place. China declared in January 1979 that there would be "no more 'political movements' or 'class struggle' which deviate from the central task and are detrimental to modernization."[65] Following that, emphasis of political movements and class struggle were no

longer the dominant theme in Beijing Review's reporting. Political cliches were gradually disappearing, too, though achievements were still stressed and lip service was still paid to the Party and leaders.[66] But all this should not be surprising considering the close relationship between the press and government in China. After all, the press is supposed to function as the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party.

In Summary, Peking Review did give sufficient coverage of the Tangshan earthquake, though it played down the disaster because of various political and historical reasons at that time. Peking Review's coverage of the earthquake at the same time revealed the close relationship between the press and the Chinese Communist Party, and the direct impact of politics on journalism then in China.

Endnotes

[1] Zhang Qingying, "Tangshan: Ten Years After the Earthquake," China Pictorial, October, 1986, p.16.

[2] Li Ning and Yang Xiaobing, "Tangshan: Reborn From Rubble," Beijing Review, 28 July 1986, p.14.

[3] Nor did Peking Review specify the earthquake scale of the previous Liaoning earthquake. See "Solicitude for People in Earthquake-Stricken Area," Peking Review, 14 February 1975, p.3; "Results of Earthquake Prediction and Forecasting," Peking Review, 21 March 1975, p.20. It appeared that Peking Review has been using the phrase "Richter scale" only since 1979. See "Earthquake Hits Liyang, Jiangsu Province," Peking Review, 20 July 1979; "Yunnan Quake is Decade's Deadliest," Beijing Review, 21 November 1988.

[4] "Rebuilding Tangshan After Earthquake," Peking Review, 28 December 1979, p.5.

[5] Raymond Carroll et al., "China's Killer Quake," Newsweek, 9 August 1976, p.30; "China: Shock and Terror in the Night," Time, 9 August 1976, p.22; "Chinese Earthquake: Latest in a Chain That Raises Worldwide Concern," U.S. News & World Report, 9 August 1976, p.18.

[6] "Rebuilding Tangshan After Earthquake," Peking Review, 28 December 1979, p.5.

[7] Paul C. Jennings, ed., Earthquake Engineering and Hazards Reduction in China (Washington D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1980), p.70; William A. Hachten, The World News Prism, 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), p.27; William C. Adams, "Whose Lives Count?: TV Coverage of Natural Disasters," Journal of Communication, vol.36(2), p.117.

[8] I come from near Tangshan and visited friends there many times after the quake. People there were not happy about the government's trying to cover it up while so many of their family members, friends, relatives, colleagues, or coworkers had died in the earthquake. Their estimation was that, instead of about 30 percent of Tangshan's one million population being killed, only about 30 percent of the people survived.

[9] Peking Review was first published in 1958 only in English. French, Spanish and Japanese editions were launched in 1963 and a German edition was added in 1964. Published in five languages, the magazine reprints or excerpts articles translated from other Chinese periodicals or newspapers as well as publishing its own.

[10] The Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976) is now often referred to as "the turbulent ten years" or "ten years of disasters." It was such a complicated and controversial historical event that it connot be summarized here. But many books have been published in English about the Cultural Revolution. See, for example, Gao Yuan, Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987); Tang Tsou, The Cultural Revolution and Post Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[11] The "gang-of-four" refers to Wang Hung-wen (First Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party then), Chang Chun-chiao, Chiang Ching (Mao's wife) and Yao Wen-yuan, who were all former Party leaders. They were also the people often held responsible for the performance of Chinese media as well as many other damaging things done to the country during the Cultural Revolution.

[12] The 1976 bound volume of Peking Review (vol.19) has no index in it. The articles in 1976 were found simply by going back to the date of the earthquake and going through the magazines issue by issue. Later articles were found through the magazines's own index.

[13] Peking Review was regularly published on Fridays. The August 9, 1976, issue was published on a Monday, three days late. While reasons for the delay could be because of the fact that it was a combined issue, there seemed to be more to it than that. See later discussion in the paper.

[14] "C.P.C. Central Committee's Message of Sympathy to the Earthquake-Stricken Area," Peking Review, 9 August 1976, p.5.

[15] Ibid., p.5. Boldtype, which refers to quotations from Mao's little red book, was in the original. In China, it was a common practice to use bold-face type to refer to Mao's sayings.

[16] "Renmin Ribao" Editorial, "Heroic People Are Invincible," Peking Review, 9 August 1976, p.5. "Renmin Ribao" is Chinese phonetic spelling for The People's Daily, which is the largest national newspaper published by the Chinese Communist Party. The People's Daily editorials play an important role in the Chinese press. In a way, they always set the tone for the rest of China's newspapers and magazines in their reporting. This was probably why Peking Review published a number of them and why its tone was so identical to that of those editorials.

[17] Ibid., p.6.

[18] Ibid., p.6.

[19] Ibid., p.6.

[20] Hsinhua News Dispatch, "Central Delegation in Earthquake-Stricken Area," Peking Review, 9 August 1976, p.7.

[21] "Man Will Conquer Nature: People in Afflicted Area Fight Quake," Peking Review, 9 August 1976, p.5.

[22] Ibid., p.10.

[23] Ibid., p.10. Also see p.5, p.6, and p.7 in the same issue.

[24] "Remnin Ribao" Editorial, "Deepen the Criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping in Anti-Quake and Relief Work," Peking Review, 20 August 1976, p.5.

[25] Ibid., p.5.

[26] Ibid., p.5.

[27] Ibid., p.6.

[28] "A Heroic People, a Heroic Army," Peking Review, 20 August 1976, pp.6-10.

[29] "Renmin Ribao" Commentary, "A Miracle," Peking Review, 20 August 1976, p.7.

[30] Ibid., p.7.

[31] "Foreign Leaders Cable Solicitude Over China's Earthquake," Peking Review, 27 August 1976, p.3; "Messages of Solicitude From Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations," Peking Review, 27 August 1976, p.3.

[32] "Fearless People," Peking Review, 27 August 1976, p.10.

[33] Ibid., pp.10-12.

[34] Ibid., p.12.

[35] "Tangshan Iron and Steel Company Partially Resumes Production," Peking Review, 3 September 1976, p.4.

[36] "Advanced units and individuals" are pace-setters, or those who are supposed to have made greater contributions than others. Any type of organization, institution, company or factory are called "units" in China. Selecting "advanced units or individuals" or holding conferences of such representatives were a common practice then.

[37] "Conference of Representatives of Advanced Units and Individuals in Anti-Quake and Relief Work," Peking Review, 8 September 1976, p.5.

[38] Ibid., p.10.

[39] Ibid., p.11.

[40] Raymond Carroll et al., "China's Killer Quake," Newsweek, 9 August 1976, p.32.

[41] "The 'Gang of Four' Sabotages Anti-Earthquake and Relief Work," Peking Review, 26 September 1976, p.17.

[42] Ibid., p.18.

[43] Ibid., p.19.

[44] "Good News From Tangshan," Peking Review, 21 January 1977, p.32.

[45] "A Year After the Earthquake," Peking Review, 5 August 1977, p.25.

[46] "Rebuilding Tangshan After Earthquake," Peking Review, 28 December 1979, p.5.

[47] Li Ning and Yang Xiaobing, "Tangshan: Reborn From Rubble," Peking Review, 28 July 1986, p.16. Hu Yaobang was then the Party Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, Premier, Deng Xiaoping, vice Premier, and Li Xiannian, President of the state.

[48] Ibid., p.17.

[49] "Solicitude for People in Earthquake-Stricken Area," Peking Review, February 14, 1975, p.3

[50] "China: Shock and Terror in the Night," Time, 9 August 1976, p.22; "Chinese Earthquake: Latest in a Chain That Raises Worldwide Concern," U.S. News & World Report, 9 August 1976, p.18.

[51] Tseng Yun, "How China Carries Out the Policy of Self-Reliance," Peking Review, 18 June 1965, pp.12-14.

[52] Ibid., p.15.

[53] The Constitution of the People's republic of China (adopted on January 15, 1975), Peking Review, 24 January 1975, p.13.

[54] Tseng Yun, "How China Carries Out the Policy of Self-Reliance," Peking Review, 18 June 1965, p.15.

[55] Previously, there had been two earthquakes, one in Liaoning and one in Yunnan. The earthquake scales were reported the same, for example, by Peking Review and The New York Times. For the Liaoning earthquake in 1975, see "Solicitude for People in Earthquake-Stricken Area," Peking Review, February 14, 1975, p.3; The New York Times Index (1975), vol.1, p.625. For the

earthquake that struck Yunnan in June 1976, see "Anti-Earthquake Relief Work in Afflicted Area in Yunnan," Peking Review, 11 June 1976, p.6; The New York Times Index (1976), p.423.

[56] This was what I heard people speculating in China. Whether there is any evidence for the speculation, I am not sure. But what they were saying was that if an earthquake reached above 8.0 on the Richter scale, international aid would have to be permitted. China reported a much lower scale because it did not want to accept any foreign aid at the time. More over, it did not want to have any foreigners come into the earthquake area so that the true severity of the quake would remain unknown.

[57] The issue that first covered Mao's death was dated September 13, 1976, which was a Monday, four days ahead of the regular publication date.

[58] "The walls came tumbling down," Economist, 7 August 1976, p.35.

[59] "Conference of Representatives of Advanced Units and Individuals in Anti-Quake and Relief Work," Peking Review, 8 September 1976, p.10.

[60] William A. Hachten, The World News Prism, 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), p.26.

[61] Ithiel de Sola Pool et al. eds., Handbook of Communication (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1973), p.463.

[62] Paul C. Jennings, ed., Earthquake Engineering and Hazards Reduction in China (Washington D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1980), p.82.

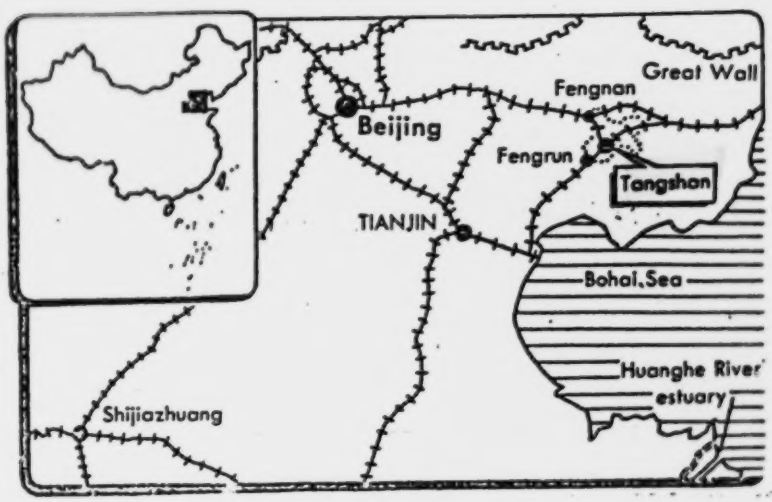
[63] Ibid., p. 70.

[64] During the years of the Cultural Revolution, especially in the first few years, everybody automatically used those phrases in almost any type of writing. Later on, people still felt obligated to use them from time to time. The effect was carried on to sometime even after 1977, when China was supposed to have entered a new era.

[65] "Historic Shift: All-Out Effort for Modernization," 5 January 1979, p.7

[66] See Li Ning and Yang Xiaobing, "Tangshan: Reborn From Rubble," Peking Review, 28 July 1986, p.16.

Appendix

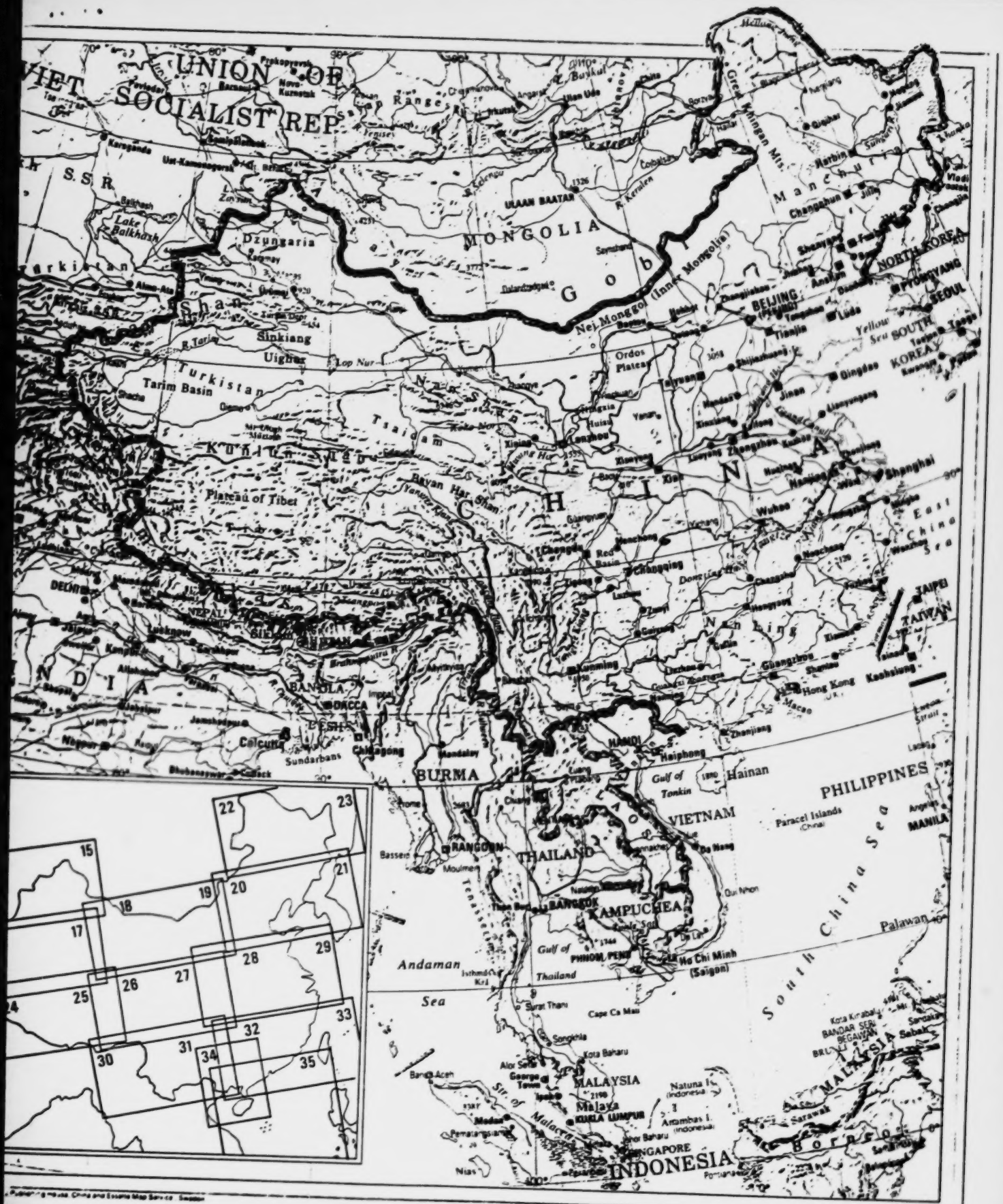


Reprinted from Beijing Review, July 28, 1986, p.19

Shock waves: The scale read 8.2

August 9, 1976

Reprinted from Newsweek, August 9, 1976, p.31


UNION OF SOCIALIST REP
S.S.R.
MONGOLIA
ULAAN BAATAR
Gobi
Manchuria
Dzungaria
Lake Balkhash
Sinkiang Uighur
Turkistan
Tarim Basin
Lop Nur
Tsaidam
Kunlun Mts
Plateau of Tibet
Nei Monggol (Inner Mongolia)
Ordos Plateau
Great Khingan Mts
BEIJING
TIANJIN
NORTH KOREA
PYONGYANG
SOUTH KOREA
SEOUL
Yellow Sea
CHINA
Shanghai
East China Sea
TAIWAN
Hong Kong
Macao
Kaohsiung
INDIA
NEPAL
DELHI
BANGLADESH
DACCA
Calcutta
Sundarbans
Chittagong
BURMA
Mandalay
HANOI
Haiphong
Gulf of Tonkin
Hainan
PHILIPPINES
VIETNAM
Paracel Islands (China)
MANILA
RANGOON
THAILAND
BANGKOK
KAMPUCHEA
PHNOM PENH
Ho Chi Minh (Saigon)
Gulf of Thailand
Andaman Sea
Isthmus of Kra
Cape Ca Mau
South China Sea
Palawan
Kota Kinabalu
BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
BRUNEI
Sabah
MALAYSIA
Sarawak
Kota Baharu
Alor Setar
George Town
Penang
Malaya
KUALA LUMPUR
Natuna Is. (Indonesia)
Anambas I. (Indonesia)
Strait of Malacca
SINGAPORE
INDONESIA
Borneo
Banda Aceh
Medan
Nias
Pontianak
Tenasserim
Bassein
Moulmein
Da Nang
Qui Nhon
Surat Thani
Songkhla
Tsinghai
Yunnan
Kweichow
Kwangsi
Kwangtung
Fukien
Chekiang
Kiangsu
Anhwei
Honan
Hupeh
Hunan
Kiangsi
Shensi
Shansi
Hopeh
Liaoning
Kirin
Heilungkiang
Inner Mongolia
Ningsia
Kansu
Sinkiang
Tibet
Red Basin
Changsha
Wuhan
Nanchang
Hangchow
Fuchow
Changchun
Harbin
Jilin
Shenyang
Anshan
Fushun
Dalian
Tientsin
Tsingtao
Taiyuan
Jinan
Lanchow
Sian
Loyang
Zhengzhou
Kaifeng
Hsuchow
Nanking
Wuhsi
Soochow
Ningpo
Wenchow
Foochow
Amoy
Swatow
Canton
Kunming
Kweiyang
Chungking
Changchih
Yangchuan
Yenan
Paotow
Huhehot
Taiyuan
Shihchiachuang
Tsinan
Tsingtao
Lianyungang
Xuzhou
Yangchow
Chinkiang
Soochow
Hangchow
Shaoxing
Ningpo
Wenchow
Foochow
Amoy
Swatow
Canton
Kaohsiung
Taipei
Hong Kong
Macao
Haikou
Zhanjiang
Beihai
Nanning
Liuchow
Kweilin
Wuchow
Kunming
Tali
Lashio
Mandalay
Myitkyina
Bhamo
Lashio
Taunggyi
Loikaw
Toungoo
Prome
Sittang
Rangoon
Bassein
Moulmein
Tavoy
Mergui
Victoria Point
Phuket
Songkhla
Surat Thani
Nakhon Si Thammarat
Hat Yai
Sungai Golok
Kota Baharu
Kuala Terengganu
Kuantan
Mersing
Johor Baharu
Singapore
Pontianak
Sambas
Kuching
Sibu
Miri
Brunei
Kota Kinabalu
Sandakan
Tawau
Balikpapan
Samarinda
Tarakan
Banjarmasin
Pangkalanbuun
Sampit
Kuala Kapuas
Ketapang
Sintang
Nunukan
Tanjung Selor
Long Bawan
Long Nawang
Long Pahangai
Long Apung
Long Iram
Long Bagun
Long Kemuat
Long Kemuat
Long Kemuat